

Respectfully Submitted to the  
**United States House of Representatives – Committee on Agriculture  
Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry**

Submitted by the  
**National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE)**  
Alexandria, Virginia

Represented by  
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**Senator Torricelli Amendment to S. 1, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,  
to require local educational agencies and schools to implement school pest management plans  
and to provide parents, guardians, and staff members with notice of the use of pesticides in  
schools.**

**Introduction**

Chairman Goodlatte, and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of our Nation's school-based agriculture teachers. I am Paul Jaure. I teach agriscience at A.C. Jones High School in Beeville, Texas. This year, I am serving as president of the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE). The NAAE office is located in Alexandria, Virginia. Also with me is Dr. Wm. Jay Jackman, who is the executive director of NAAE. If the need arises, and with your permission, I might call on Dr. Jackman to assist with your questions following my statement.

In this testimony, I will provide general information regarding school-based agricultural education throughout the United States. I am confident that most of you are aware of agricultural education programs in local schools; however, I want to make sure all of you understand the importance of what and how we teach students.

Then, I want to ensure the distinguished Members of the subcommittee that agriculture teachers throughout the United States support safe and proper handling and use of pesticides in public places, including within schools. Yet, I want to share the concerns we have about the language proposed in Senator Torricelli's amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act regarding the use of pesticides in schools.

## **Background on Agricultural Education in Public Schools**

It is estimated that by the year 2030, the population of the world will be approximately 8.5 billion people. The food supply must be tripled in the next 20 years to feed the people of the world. How can we address this phenomenal challenge? School-based agricultural education is an important part of the answer to these questions. School-based agricultural education programs are focused on educating the people who will assume the responsibility for production, processing, marketing, distribution, and ensuring safety of the food and fiber for the Earth's growing population.

Agricultural education is an important component of public school instruction in every state of the United States and in five United States Territories. There are approximately 750,000 agricultural education students in the nation who are taught by about 12,000 secondary and 2-year postsecondary teachers. It is estimated that the contact hours of in-school instruction in and about agriculture exceed 10 million annually.

### ***Comments on How We Teach***

School-based agricultural education in the United States consists of three closely related activities. These three activities are: 1) classroom/laboratory instruction; 2) supervised agricultural experience; and 3) leadership development. The interaction effects of these three components help to ensure students' career success or continuation with higher education related to agriscience and/or agribusiness following high school graduation. No single one of the activities stands alone. The success of each local agricultural education program depends on the extent to which these three activities are incorporated into the educational program.

#### ***Classroom and Laboratory Instruction***

Organized instruction is the classroom and laboratory component of agricultural education. This instruction may be carried out in a classroom, laboratory, greenhouse, or field trip setting. Classroom and laboratory instruction includes units based on natural and social sciences such as environmental science, agribusiness, natural resources, aquaculture, animal and plant sciences, entrepreneurship, and many other areas. Emphasis is placed on teaching/learning science, mathematics, and language arts principles in the context of the applied food and agricultural sciences.

#### ***Supervised Agricultural Experience***

Supervised agricultural experience (SAE) is the individual student application, outside the classroom, of knowledge and skills acquired through the instructional component. SAE is under the supervision of the agriculture teacher, and an employer or parents. There are various categories of SAE from which students may choose. A student with an ownership SAE activity owns and manages his/her own business. A student participating in a placement SAE activity is involved in an employment situation. Research SAE activities allow students opportunities to engage in independent, yet supervised, research projects. The interaction of the student, teacher, business site, and parents helps to ensure instruction is

relevant to each individual student in his/her own learning environment. This model may sound a little like “School to Career”—one of the prominent educational trends in the United States. The fact is, agricultural education is “The Original School to Career” model!

### *Leadership Development*

Leadership development, the third component of the overall agricultural education program, is provided via student organizations such as FFA, PAS (Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization) and NYFEA (National Young Farmer Education Association). Student organization activities are designed to enrich the classroom/laboratory and SAE instructional components. Student organization activities provide students opportunities for personal growth, leadership development, and motivation for individual career success.

### *Comments on What We Teach*

The curriculum in school-based agricultural education programs has changed a great deal over the years. When agricultural education programs began nine decades ago, the focus was on training boys to become farmers. Today, the focus is on: 1) enhancing students’ skills in science, mathematics, and language arts using the applied context of agriculture and 2) preparing students for the full range of career opportunities related to the agriculture industry and for higher education in agriculture and related sciences.

Content included in agriculture education programs across the nation includes traditional areas such as animal science, plant science, agricultural mechanics, and agricultural business management. But, it also includes non-traditional areas such as greenhouse management, horticulture, floriculture, aquaculture, environmental science, turf and landscape management, biotechnology, natural resources management, and a broad range of other agriscience and agribusiness areas.

### **Pesticide Use in School-based Agricultural Education Programs**

Since pesticides are useful and necessary tools used in the agriculture industry, pesticides are used in school-based agricultural education programs. Please keep in mind that agricultural education programs focus on classroom *and* laboratory instruction. The agriscience and agribusiness concepts that are taught in the classroom are put into practice in the laboratory. Hands-on, applied, practical learning is at the very core of agricultural education.

The agricultural education laboratory setting comes in many types and descriptions. For examples, laboratories may include aquaculture facilities located inside the school building, greenhouses located adjacent to the school building, farms, livestock facilities, natural resources centers, arboreta, and/or gardens located on the school property, and many other possibilities.

When pesticide use is a common practice related to the content being taught (greenhouse management for example), proper and safe use and handling of pesticides is taught as part of the classroom

instructional program. Integrated pest management (IPM) is also taught in the classroom, given that IPM is practiced regularly throughout the industry. Then, that classroom instruction is put into practice in the laboratory (in the greenhouse for example). In many cases, state laws require that agriculture teachers who are using pesticides in their instructional programs be Certified Pesticide Applicators. Even when not required by state law, many agriculture teachers seek and achieve certified pesticide applicator status. Similarly, in many cases, whether or not required by state law, students who are going to be involved in pesticide application in the laboratory settings complete all of the requirements to become certified pesticide applicators. These state-mandated or voluntary practices help to ensure that pesticide use in agricultural education settings is safe for all persons involved.

Further, we know that not every student who completes the agricultural education instructional program will seek employment or pursue higher education in some area related to agriculture. But, we also know that every student that comes through an agricultural education program is going to be an owner or renter of a home and a member of a community. Insect, weed, rodent and other pests are present in apartments, houses, offices, communities and cities. Persons who have had the benefits of high-quality agricultural education instruction are going to be better informed citizens on issues including the proper and safe use and handling of pesticides – pesticides that anyone can go to the farm supply store, hardware store, even grocery store to purchase and use in their homes, offices, and throughout their communities. Agricultural education students learn how to select and use these products safely and effectively. We believe the risk associated with reducing or eliminating any education regarding the proper and safe use and handling of pesticides is too great.

### **Specific Challenges Presented by Senator Torricelli's Amendment to S. 1**

Please allow us to be very clear that whether mandated by local, state or federal laws, or whether on a voluntary basis, agricultural educators are committed to using pesticides safely and effectively in our instructional programs. We are committed to teaching our students to use pesticides safely and effectively. We are committed to using and teaching Integrated Pest Management to its fullest extent to control agricultural pests, protect and conserve the environment, and ensure public safety.

However, we do have concerns about Senator Torricelli's amendment to S. 1, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. We are concerned that this federal unfunded mandate could be detrimental to agricultural education programs across the Nation. In some cases where state laws have been implemented regarding pesticide use in schools, there have already been substantial problems for agricultural education programs. In some cases, agriculture teachers have been forced to eliminate the use of pesticides in their instructional programs completely, not because of potential health risks to students or school staff, but because of the potential for legal actions against them if they use pesticides – even when the pesticides are used properly and safely according to the manufacturers recommendations and other regulations imposed.

Such results from the laws cause the instructional programs to not reflect the actual industry practices and standards. Thus, the effectiveness of the instruction is reduced. How can agriculture teachers

adequately prepare their students for careers, and higher education, in areas related to agriculture when they cannot teach common practices in their classrooms and laboratories?

Following is a discussion of the specific concerns we have with Senator Torricelli's amendment to S. 1.

### ***Contact Person***

The amendment calls for a contact person to be identified in each local education agency. The contact person must be a qualified person, perhaps a certified pesticide applicator. Especially in poorly funded, rural school districts there is a strong risk that the agriculture teacher, who may already be a certified pesticide applicator, could be burdened with this additional responsibility. The role of the agriculture teacher is already complete with classroom and laboratory instruction activities, supervision of each student's agricultural experience program (which often involves home or workplace visits after school hours), and FFA chapter advisement responsibilities (which occur both during and after school hours). What part of the agricultural education program will suffer if the agriculture teacher is now burdened additionally with school pesticide use contact person duties?

### ***Notification Requirements***

We are grateful for the provision in Senator Torricelli's amendment that excludes the 24-hour notification requirement for pesticide applications that are a part of the agricultural education instructional program as long as the pesticide products used are included in a universal notification at the beginning of the school year.

Yet, preparing this list of products that the agriculture teacher anticipates using throughout the year will be extensive. This requirement will be a substantial burden on the agriculture teacher. In addition, if the teacher determines the need to use a pesticide during the year that is not included in the notification provided at the beginning of the school year, the agriculture teacher will be responsible for the 24-hour prior notice to the persons listed on the registry. Again, this will be an additional burden on the agriculture teacher.

Please bear in mind that the agriculture teacher, often times a certified pesticide applicator, would be using the pesticides in accordance with all of the safety rules and regulations of the pesticide manufacturer and other regulatory agencies. We question why more federal regulations regarding pesticide use are needed.

### ***Emergencies***

There are provisions in the amendment that address emergencies. The definition in the amendment addresses threats to the health and safety of students and staff members. We assume this language implies that an emergency condition would exist only in the case of stinging or biting insect pests that present health risks to persons. We believe there could be a need for emergency applications of pesticides in agricultural education laboratories. Such emergencies would not endanger humans; rather,

such emergencies would endanger the health of the living plant or animal materials used in the laboratories. To do anything but respond immediately to these emergencies would be poor teaching and could lead to catastrophic results in the laboratories. Therefore, we request the definition of emergencies to be expanded to include components of agricultural education instructional programs.

### ***Potential for Legal Actions Against the School and the Agriculture Teacher***

There are numerous concerns regarding the language in the amendment that give rise to the potential for law suits to be filed against the school districts and the teachers. First, the risk language is scary. It is certainly true that overexposure to some chemicals is harmful to humans, especially pregnant women, infants and children. But, is there any evidence that suggests that children and adults are at any greater health risk from overexposure to pesticides at school than at any other location? To present this language to parents, guardians and school staff seems to be inviting undue concern and potential legal actions.

Emergency application of pesticides, with notification after the fact, also could present interesting legal consequences.

Further, if the risks of pesticide application in schools are so great, will parents/guardians expect their children to be offered excused absences from school following pesticide applications?

### ***Increased Costs to Agricultural Education Programs***

Currently, we are experiencing a nationwide shortage of agriculture teachers. Adding these additional requirements to the agriculture teachers' responsibilities may make the teaching profession less appealing to some, thereby making the teacher shortage problem even worse. We believe agriculture teachers are doing a great job of using pesticides in their instructional programs safely and effectively and we believe the teachers are teaching their students to use the products safely as well, which has a positive result when the students become home owners and citizens within communities. We do not believe that additional regulations on pesticide use in agricultural education programs will advance agricultural education.

Further, will school administrators be in a position to continue agricultural education programs and start new agricultural education programs if the risk of potential legal actions and additional reporting/notification requirements are imposed? We fear that such additional regulations could be detrimental to the future of school-based agricultural education.

### **Summary**

Agriculture teachers nationwide believe strongly in keeping both children and adults safe from misuse and overexposure to pesticides. Yet, we recognize that pesticides are a necessary and beneficial component of the agriculture industry – from the farm/ranch to the consumer. For agricultural education to be effective, we must not be hindered from properly and safely using pesticides in our in-door and

out-door laboratories. And, we must not be hindered from teaching our students the proper and safe use and handling of pesticides. To do otherwise would be harmful to the agriculture industry and hazardous to human health, given that pesticides are used everyday by citizens in their homes and workplaces. Please allow us to teach students to use pesticides properly, which will result in successful agriculture enterprises and safe human health.

We request that the United States Congress not take any actions that will prevent agriculture teachers from teaching students to be responsible workers within the agriculture industry, well-informed members of communities, and effective stewards of our environment. Please allow agriculture teachers to continue to teach proper use of pesticides, which will, in fact, benefit the health and well being of humankind.

### **For More Information**

Thank you for the opportunity to present our positions to the subcommittee members. Should you have further questions or comments regarding our testimony, please contact us as follows:

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